



# **OES Law Enforcement Branch**

## **SAR Distress Alert Policy 6.01**

### **(Release Copy)**

**SAR DISTRESS ALERTS 6.01**

**July 1, 2003**  
**(Revised September 6, 2004)**

### **BACKGROUND**

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services – Law Enforcement Branch, serving as the California State Search and Rescue (SAR) Coordinator, is the recipient of and is responsible for coordinating SAR responses to various distress alerts that occur within this State. Specifically, OES receives State notification and is responsible for coordinating State SAR responses to the following:

- **ALNOT** - "Alert Notification": Missing or overdue aircraft alerts
- **ELT** - "Emergency Locator Transmitter": Automatically or manually activated aircraft distress signal transmitter alerts
- **EPIRB** - "Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon": Automatically or manually activated vessel/boat distress signal transmitter alerts
- **PLB** - "Personal Locator Beacon": Manually activated personal distress signal transmitter alerts

### **POLICY**

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services will respond to each report of a distress signal and/or missing or overdue aircraft as an emergency. While history has shown that the majority of ALNOT, ELT, EPIRB, and PLB alert missions are in fact false distress alerts, the emphasis shall be to coordinate responses to each incident as an actual emergency until proven otherwise.

The Governor's Office of Emergency Services response will consist of notifications to and coordination with all relevant Federal, State, and local government jurisdictional agencies.

**Note:** Notifications and coordination from the Governor's Office of Emergency Services with all local government jurisdictions will commence at the Operational Area (OA)/County level.

*(This Policy and Procedure document has been reviewed and accepted by the management of AFRCC, USCG, CAWG CAP, W/C, and OES LEB. 09/06/04)*

## **JURISDICTION**

Pursuant to the California Government Code (Emergency Services Act) and the California Law Enforcement Mutual Aid Plan, the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) Law Enforcement Branch (LEB) is responsible for coordinating responses to SAR distress alerts within the State.

The State of California, OES, having coordination jurisdiction over these types of SAR incidents within the State, operates in cooperation with the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC), the United States Coast Guard (USCG), and the California Wing (CAWG) of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP). The AFRCC is responsible for National Inland SAR coordination and operates under the National SAR Plan. The AFRCC provides assistance to the State of California by alerting and providing federal assets for response to inland SAR incidents. The USCG is responsible for Maritime SAR coordination and operates under the National SAR Plan. The USCG provides assistance to the State of California by providing federal asset response to Maritime SAR incidents and to non-Maritime SAR incidents on an as available basis. The CAWG CAP operates under the National SAR Plan and provides assistance to the State of California by providing aircraft and personnel to search for and locate the source of distress alert beacons and/or the location of missing or overdue aircraft. CAWG CAP resources are tasked as either a Federal resource of AFRCC or as a State resource of OES. Regardless of tasking avenues, all in-state, multi-county distress alert CAWG CAP mission efforts are in direct support to the State and are under the management control of the State (OES) jurisdiction.

The State of California (OES) maintains jurisdiction on distress alert incidents as long as the source of the distress alert signal and or search location for a missing or overdue aircraft are likely to be within the State, involving multiple counties, yet a specific county/operational area (OA) location cannot be determined. Once the scope of the search effort narrows to a specific OA, the jurisdiction for the search incident transfers to that county's OA Law Enforcement (LE) Agency. It is at this point that OES, AFRCC, USCG, and CAWG CAP become an assistant to and will only operate in support of that jurisdiction. The jurisdictional OA LE agency may at this point elect to assume Incident Command and total SAR responsibility for the incident. Or, the OA LE agency may elect to operate a Unified Command in conjunction with OES, AFRCC, USCG, and CAWG CAP in a combined SAR effort. Or lastly, the OA LE agency may request that OES, AFRCC, USCG, and CAWG CAP continue sole Incident Command SAR response efforts on behalf of the identified county.

## **PROCEDURE**

### **(ALNOT) Aircraft, Missing or Overdue “Alert Notification”:**

1. Upon a California State Warning Center (W/C) receipt of an ALNOT, or a report of an aircraft that is missing, overdue, or has dropped off radio/radar contact, from the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC), the OES Emergency Notification Controller (ENC) will attempt to ascertain the aircraft tail number, a physical description of the aircraft such as make/model, number of engines, color, etc, departure and arrival points/times, number of persons on board and their identities, the aircraft owner’s information, and/or the aircraft’s last known point from the AFRCC. If only a tail number is known, the ENC will continue to work with AFRCC and query CLETS for owner and aircraft information.
2. If the AFRCC has initiated an AFRCC “incident” or “mission”, the ENC will assign an OES LEB/SAR mission number and provide it to the AFRCC. If not already completed by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) - Flight Service Stations (FSS), the AFRCC may initiate ramp checks at the departure/arrival points and at airports along the flight path and/or request assistance in doing so from OES. The AFRCC will then activate the California Wing (CAWG) of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) as appropriate and will begin to identify a CAWG CAP Incident Commander (IC) for the mission.
3. The ENC will then send a California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS) message to all Watch Commanders/SAR Coordinators within the area of the State affected (This may be in addition to previous requests made to specific local law enforcement agencies for ramp checks etc., by the FAA FSS).
4. When CAP is alerted or activated, both AFRCC and CAP are under agreement to contact the W/C within 30 minutes of this notification to provide the CAP IC’s identity and Point of Contact (POC) numbers.
5. The ENC will monitor the time and as soon as the CAP IC’s POC numbers are received (within 30 minutes) the ENC will contact the Law Duty Officer (LDO) and provide a briefing of the ALNOT as well as all actions taken. The ENC will also identify the counties or jurisdictions affected, and provide the CAP IC’s information.
6. The LDO will determine if contact with the potentially affected jurisdictional SAR agency(s), at the Operational Area/County level, and/or the CAP IC is necessary. This communication will identify the State’s resources (CAP) response to local government jurisdictional agencies to assure that all affected agencies are fully aware of the incident and coordinating their efforts in a unified manner.
  - A. Some subjective factors to evaluate in determining levels of contact and coordination are weather conditions, aircraft capabilities, VFR verses IFR, pilot experience, pilot familiarity with the route, mountain pass altitudes along the route, etc.
7. Both the ENC and the LDO will keep each other apprised of any status changes throughout the duration of the incident.
8. The LDO will keep the mission report database updated as much as possible and in some rare cases may request that these updates be entered by the ENC.

### **(ELT) Aircraft “Emergency Locator Transmitter”:**

1. Upon a W/C receipt of an ELT, from the AFRCC, the ENC will ascertain the approximate location of the signal, as well as any information associated with the receipt of that signal (Some newer ELT units transmit data such as the registered owner as well as GPS coordinates), from the AFRCC. The ENC will also identify the county(s) or jurisdictions affected
2. The ENC will assign an OES LEB/SAR mission number and provide it to the AFRCC.
3. The AFRCC will then activate the CAP or may request that OES activate CAP.
4. The ENC will then contact the affected jurisdictional Operational Area County Sheriff’s Department’s 24 hour contact number and request to speak to the “Watch Commander” or “SAR Coordinator”. Once contacted, the ENC will brief them on the ELT signal and provide them with the details known and inform them that a CAP IC is in the process of being identified for the State or Federal response to the incident (Often very minimal information is known at this point and accuracy of distress alert signals received are questionable). The ENC will advise that once the CAP IC is identified, that they, the ENC, will call back to provide the IC’s contact information to facilitate unified response plans and to update information regarding the distress alert signal.
5. When CAP is alerted or activated, both AFRCC and CAP are under agreement to contact the W/C within 30 minutes of this notification to provide the CAP IC POC numbers.
6. The ENC will monitor the time and as soon as the CAP IC’s POC numbers are received (within 30 minutes) the ENC will re-contact the affected jurisdictional Operational Area County Sheriff’s Department’s “Watch Commander” or “SAR Coordinator” and provide them with the CAP IC’s name and contact numbers. This communication will identify the State or Federal resources (CAP) response to local government jurisdictional agencies to assure that all affected agencies are fully aware of the incident and coordinating their efforts in a unified manner.
  - A. The Operational Area (OA) Sheriff’s Department may not be the law enforcement agency with physical jurisdiction over the geographical location where the distress alert beacon is sounding. It may be a municipal Police Department within that OA. Within the guidelines of the Law Enforcement (LE) Mutual Aid Plan, coordination is conducted from the State (OES) to the OA LE level. The OA LE agency is expected to coordinate responses to these alerts within their counties, with their affected municipal LE, local government jurisdictions. But, if for any reason this coordination request with the OA is unsuccessful, the ENC shall immediately notify the LDO. The LDO will then contact the OA and attempt to facilitate communication between the OA and municipal jurisdiction to ascertain who will assume Incident Command or who will coordinate with State or Federal assets responding. If this occurs, both the ENC and LDO shall log all communications (times, persons spoken to, etc) into the RIMS report for follow up by the Law Enforcement Branch at a later time.

**(ELT) Aircraft “Emergency Locator Transmitter” (Continued):**

7. The LDO will contact the W/C each morning, during normal waking/working hours of each day, prior to the issuance of the LDO report as required, to check on any W/C handled distress alert missions and will conduct any follow up coordination necessary with these missions.
8. If the ENC does not receive the identity or contact information of the CAP IC from CAP or AFRCC within 30 minutes, in order to re-contact the jurisdictional OA Sheriff’s Department, the ENC shall immediately notify the LDO. The LDO will then work to obtain this information and coordinate it’s dissemination.
  - A. Once notified, the local jurisdiction LE may choose to allow CAP to solely conduct the mission. If so, insure that they are updated as to any status changes, dispositions, etc. either by direct communication from the CAP IC or personally by the LDO.
  - B. The local jurisdiction LE may also choose to assume the mission with the assistance of CAP. If so, the LDO will insure that both the local jurisdiction SAR Coordinator/Watch Commander and the CAP IC are communicating and coordinating their respective response efforts. This coordination should be conducted from a joint incident command post staffed by both the local LE jurisdiction as well as liaison representatives from the CAP.
  - C. The local jurisdiction LE may also choose to assume the mission without the assistance of CAP. If so, the LDO will encourage accepting the assistance of CAP but will also insure that any decisions to assume the mission without the assistance of CAP is immediately communicated to the CAP IC, AFRCC, and W/C.
  - D. The OES MOU with CAWG CAP requires CAP to notify local LE directly when conducting searches for missing aircraft or distress alert signals in a specific jurisdiction. CAP is then required to advise the ENC that the notification was made and who was contacted.
9. The LDO will monitor the progress of ELT missions pending final disposition. As such, if a mission occurs after hours and all notifications are made by the W/C, the LDO will make follow up calls during normal working hours or daytime hours, prior to the issuance of the LDO report as required, to determine the status of the mission and to assure that coordination is being conducted between CAP (State Resources) and local government as well as determining any additional resource needs for the mission
10. Both the ENC and the LDO will keep each other apprised of any status changes learned throughout the duration of the incident.
11. The LDO will keep the mission report database updated as much as possible and in some rare cases may request that these updates be entered by the ENC.

**(EPIRB) Vessel/Boat “Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon”:**

1. Rarely will the W/C receive a report of an EPIRB signal, as they are typically located on vessels that operating in the Maritime environment. Responses to these types of distress signals are routed directly to the United States Coast Guard (USCG). Occasionally an EPIRB distress signal may originate from a State inland waterway and/or a reservoir. These signals will be routed to the W/C. Upon a W/C receipt of an EPIRB, from either the AFRCC or USCG the ENC will ascertain the approximate waterway location of the signal, as well as any information associated with the receipt of that signal (Some EPIRB's are capable of transmitting data such as the vessel information as well as GPS coordinates), from the AFRCC.
2. The ENC will assign an OES LEB/SAR Mission Number and provide it to the AFRCC or USCG.
3. The AFRCC will then activate the CAP or may request that OES activate CAP.
4. The ENC will then contact the affected jurisdictional Operational Area County Sheriff's Department's 24 hour contact number and request to speak to the “Watch Commander” or “SAR Coordinator”. Once contacted, the ENC will brief them on the EPIRB signal and provide them with the details known and inform them that a CAP IC is in the process of being identified for the State or Federal response to the incident (Often very minimal information is known at this point and accuracy of distress alert signals received are questionable). The ENC will advise that once the CAP IC is identified, that they, the ENC, will call back to provide the IC's contact information to facilitate unified response plans and to update information regarding the distress alert signal.
5. When CAP is alerted or activated, both AFRCC and CAP are under agreement to contact the W/C within 30 minutes of this notification to provide the CAP IC's POC numbers.
6. The ENC will monitor the time and as soon as the CAP IC's POC numbers are received (within 30 minutes) the ENC will re-contact the affected jurisdictional Operational Area County Sheriff's Department's “Watch Commander” or “SAR Coordinator” and provide them with the CAP IC's name and contact numbers. This communication will identify the State or Federal resources (CAP) response to local government jurisdictional agencies to assure that all affected agencies are fully aware of the incident and coordinating their efforts in a unified manner.

**(EPIRB) Vessel/Boat “Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon” (Continued):**

- A. The Operational Area (OA) Sheriff’s Department may not be the law enforcement agency with physical jurisdiction over the geographical location where the distress alert beacon is sounding. It may be a municipal Police Department within that OA. Within the guidelines of the Law Enforcement (LE) Mutual Aid Plan, coordination is conducted from the State (OES) to the OA LE level. The OA LE agency is expected to coordinate responses to these alerts within their counties, with their affected municipal LE, local government jurisdictions. But, if for any reason this coordination request with the OA is unsuccessful, the ENC shall immediately notify the LDO. The LDO will then contact the OA and attempt to facilitate communication between the OA and municipal jurisdiction to ascertain who will assume Incident Command or who will coordinate with State or Federal assets responding. If this occurs, both the ENC and LDO shall log all communications (times, persons spoken to, etc) into the RIMS report for follow up by the Law Enforcement Branch at a later time.
- 7. The LDO will contact the W/C each morning, during normal waking/working hours of each day to check on any W/C handled distress alert missions and will conduct any follow up coordination necessary with these missions.
- 8. If the ENC does not receive the identity or contact information of the CAP IC from CAP or AFRCC within 30 minutes, in order to contact the jurisdictional OA Sheriff’s Department, the ENC shall immediately notify the LDO. The LDO will then work to obtain this information and coordinate it’s dissemination.
  - A. Once notified, the local jurisdiction LE may choose to allow CAP to solely conduct the mission. If so, insure that they are updated as to any status changes, dispositions, etc. either by direct communication from the CAP IC or personally by the LDO.
  - B. The local jurisdiction LE may also choose to assume the mission with the assistance of CAP. If so, the LDO will insure that both the local jurisdiction SAR Coordinator/Watch Commander and the CAP IC are communicating and coordinating their respective response efforts. This coordination should be conducted from a joint incident command post staffed by both the local LE jurisdiction as well as liaison representatives from the CAP.
  - C. The local jurisdiction LE may also choose to assume the mission without the assistance of CAP. If so, the LDO will encourage accepting the assistance of CAP but will also insure that any decisions to assume the mission without the assistance of CAP is immediately communicated to the CAP IC, AFRCC, and W/C.
  - D. The OES MOU with CAP CAWG requires CAP to notify local law enforcement when conducting searches for missing aircraft or distress alert signals in a specific jurisdiction. CAP is then required to advise the ENC that the notification was made and who was contacted.

**(EPIRB) Vessel/Boat “Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon” (Continued):**

9. The LDO will monitor the progress of EPIRB missions pending final disposition. As such, if a mission occurs after hours and all notifications are made by the W/C, the LDO will make follow up calls during normal working hours or daytime hours, prior to the issuance of the LDO report as required, to determine the status of the mission and to assure that coordination is being conducted between CAP (State Resources) and local government as well as determining any additional resource needs for the mission.
10. Both the ENC and the LDO will keep each other apprised of any status changes learned throughout the duration of the incident
11. The LDO will keep the mission report database updated as much as possible and in some rare cases may request that these updates be entered by the ENC



**(PLB) Persons “Personal Locator Beacon”:**

1. All PLB signals received within California will be routed to the W/C. Upon a W/C receipt of a PLB, either directly to the W/C workstation or via telephone from the AFRCC, the ENC will ascertain the approximate location of the signal as well as all data information transmitted (All PLB's are required to be registered with owner and contact information and this data is transmitted via the alert – some PLB's also transmit GPS coordinates). This registration data will be sent directly to the W/C workstation or can be forwarded via fax or e-mail from the AFRCC.
2. The ENC will assign an OES LEB/SAR Mission Number.
3. The ENC will then notify and fully brief the LDO of the PLB alert, all the data information transmitted, as well as identify the county or jurisdiction affected.
4. The LDO will then attempt to contact the registered owner/emergency contact information transmitted and determine if the signal is an actual distress or false alert.
5. If initial investigation supports that the beacon activation appears to be an actual distress alert, the LDO should attempt to obtain basic, preliminary, information such as trip plans, activity, number in the party, equipment and training, planned routes of travel, etc.
6. If initial investigations are inconclusive through an inability to contact those listed in the alert message or the status of the PLB bearer is unknown, the LDO shall presume it is an emergency and initiate an appropriate SAR response notification.
7. The LDO will then contact the affected jurisdictional Watch Commander or SAR Coordinator, at the Operational Area/County level, and brief them on the PLB signal. The LDO should offer state resource assistance, such as CAP, to assist in the search for the source of the signal. If federal assistance is needed, contact the AFRCC.
8. Both the ENC and the LDO will keep each other apprised of any status changes learned throughout the duration of the incident.
9. The LDO will keep the mission report database updated as much as possible and in some rare cases may request that these updates be entered by the ENC.
10. The LDO and ENC will insure that the required PLB incident feedback form is completed and returned to the United States Mission Control Center (USMCC). AFRCC can assist with this process if necessary.